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UNCLAS FRANKFURT 002231

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/AGS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MINISTER-PRESIDENT KOCH'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON MAY 13-15

REF: FRANKFURT 550

1. (SBU) Hesse Minister-President Koch will have an official visit Washington May 13-15. Koch would like to focus on international affairs, the U.S.-German relationship, potential U.S. military base closings in Germany, Iraq, US-EU issues, and counter-terrorism and security issues and will be seeking appropriate appointments through official channels. Koch also has an interest in Asia, particularly in increasing market access in China for German companies, and in the Tibet issue.

2. (SBU) Minister-President Koch is a likely challenger for chancellor candidate to Christian Democratic Union (CDU) chairman Angela Merkel in 2006, and has a strong interest in foreign affairs and the United States in particular. (See reftel bio cable on Koch for more details.) He and his party won an absolute majority in Hesse state elections on February 2, 2003, increasing his standing and influence in the CDU nationally. The request for the visit has already gone through the German Foreign Ministry, which will coordinate with the German Embassy. We believe it is important that Koch obtain substantive meetings at the highest appropriate level at the Department, on the Hill and at the Department of Defense. Koch announced his visit during CDU Chairman Angela Merkel's visit and is in competition with Merkel for influence in the CDU. He will likely want a good deal of press attention for his visit. Koch may also wish to visit Wisconsin during this trip, which has a sister-state relationship with Hesse. Koch is also a personal friend of HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson, whom he knows from his days as Governor of Wisconsin.

3. (U) Pol/Econ Chief Ruth M. Hall will be point of contact at the Consulate for any follow up questions or coordination, along with Pol/Econ FSN Specialist Christian O. Goebel.

4. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

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